

Research into Edinburgh street begging reveals 'deep poverty'

Shelter Scotland and The Edinburgh Community Safety Partnership have investigated those on the streets who resort to begging. They found at least 420 people begging over the two years to October 2018 showing deep, often lifelong poverty, poor mental and physical health, addiction and the constant threat of abuse.

Shelter Scotland is the charity helping those with bad housing or homelessness. The Edinburgh Community Safety Partnership includes representatives of public agencies such as NHS Lothian and Police Scotland as well Essential Edinburgh which represents city centre businesses. The Partnership has agreed that a united effort will be required to help people move on from begging.

It is hoped that this research, the first in the UK for 20 years, will be the first step in finding ways for people to escape the cycle. An overwhelming 89% is made up of Edinburgh and UK nationals and 73% of those with a last known address in Edinburgh.



Cllr Amy McNeese-Mechan

Councillor Amy McNeese-Mechan, Chair of the Edinburgh Community Safety Partnership said: “Street begging is a hugely complex issue and if we’re going to address it effectively we have to improve our understanding of it. That’s why we commissioned this important and long overdue research in partnership with Shelter Scotland – the most detailed research done on this issue in the UK for two decades. This is the first step in producing a long-term strategy to fully understand and respond to the complexities of street begging. We’ve set up a working group to analyse the findings and develop an action plan.

“All of us in the Edinburgh Community Safety Partnership are 100% committed to finding ways to support all of Edinburgh’s residents especially the most marginalised in our communities. I look forward to seeing this vital research put to good use to help people to move on from begging.”

The research was conducted by interviewing people begging on the city’s streets, and confirmed that not all rough sleepers beg, nor do all those who beg sleep rough. Most people were barely surviving financially, but around 80% reported mental health issues and 62% had health issues with many taking drugs, alcohol or both.

Fiona King, National Campaigns and Policy Manager for Shelter Scotland, said: “Behind these statistics are real people who have often survived significant trauma and hardship and they need a compassionate response. Most of them are suffering from

ill-health often including addictions. What gives us room for optimism is the evidence that support services, especially those with kind, empathetic staff and volunteers, offer people the best chance to move on from begging.

“We’re pleased to have been able to work with Edinburgh Community Safety Partnership on this research. At its heart it identifies a need for sustained investment for effective support services and good quality affordable housing which are essential to helping people move on from begging and preventing others from starting to beg in the future. We look forward to seeing the Community Safety Partnership’s response to this complex issue.”

Roddy Smith, Chief Executive of Essential Edinburgh, said:“Throughout the consultation process ahead of our renewal ballot last year, our businesses expressed concern about homelessness and begging in the city centre, realising that improving security for all in our area means working to help those most vulnerable.

“Such complex issues don’t need a short-term fix; they require a considered and sensitive strategy for real and lasting change. Essential Edinburgh already fund an expert Homelessness Case Worker as part of the Cyrenians Navigator Project and additional Police Scotland support with our own “BID Cop”, both of whom are part of the Community Safety Partnership (CSP).

“Expert knowledge and understanding is essential; Shelter Scotland’s research enables CSP to have a baseline with which to work from and will help with understanding the causes and influence the support that is needed.

“This research is the first step towards forming a strategy but it cannot be done in isolation. Only by working together can local government, law enforcement, expert third sector partners and the local business community make a significant

difference.”

Shelter Scotland

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